

# Jesus' Rejection of That Generation

📖 Matthew 12:46-13:1

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We're into Matthew 12, which is a major turning point in history. We can't overemphasize the consequences or magnitude of what transpires in this chapter for the rest of world history. What has happened so far is the leadership of the nation Israel have tried to catch Jesus on a technicality of the Law but Jesus kept trapping them. So they came to the determination that they were going to destroy Him. Then when a man with a dumb demon was brought to Him, considered an incurable case, and Jesus cast the demon out so that the man both spoke and saw the people were looking for a response from the leadership. They had to give answer because everyone knew He had done it, that was never in question; how He had done it was the only question. This was not something their sons could do. This wasn't something anyone could do. So how could He do it? The Pharisees had only two possible explanations; either He cast out demons by the Spirit of God which meant that He was the Son of David and the kingdom of God had come near to them, or He cast them out by Satan. Since the leadership were not believing in Him they made the accusation that He cast out demons by Satan. This was classified as blasphemy of the Spirit, a slandering of His work which is the only unpardonable sin. This sin had been committed by the leadership. Jesus refuted it and then gave the people an opportunity to decide for themselves whether they were going to identify with the leadership in the unpardonable sin or separate from the leadership and follow Him. This is what is going on in 12:33-37 with the tree and its fruit. They obviously had thoughts. What were they thinking? Who were they going to identify with? That is what Jesus is saying in 12:33, "either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit." The people needed to reveal their thoughts. This was a difficult decision for them because the Pharisees had been their teachers in synagogue since childhood. They were their spiritual leaders. Were they going to reject them or continue to identify with them? 12:34 shows how they could make known what they were thinking? They could speak. The Pharisees had already spoken, they had already made their thinking known. Jesus thus declared them to be a "brood of vipers." How could they, being of the evil nature of the chief Viper, Satan Himself, speak that which is good? For out of the mouth speaks that which fills the heart. In 12:35 the same truth is re-stated. A man of good nature brings out of his good thinking good words to say whereas a man of evil nature brings out of his evil thinking evil words to say. The pericope is referring specifically to what they were thinking about Jesus' casting out of demons. It's not a general idea; it's a particular idea. What did they think

about Jesus' casting out of demons? Show us what you think by what you say. In 12:36 He issues a strict warning, "But I tell you that every groundless accusation that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment." His point is that accusations made without any firm ground will not be without consequences in that day. Jesus had already firmly refuted every possible grounds for accusing Him of being demon possessed. He was not continually possessed by a demon. So for them to join the leadership in denouncing Him as being demon possessed would not be without consequences. They needed to measure their words carefully because in 12:37, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." That is, by your words related to Jesus' casting out of demons, you will either be justified or condemned. To be justified would be to side with Jesus by saying that He cast out demons by the Spirit of God and therefore separated from that generation which was going to judgment for the unpardonable sin in AD70. To be condemned would be to side with the Pharisees by saying that Jesus cast out demons by Satan and therefore identified with that generation in committing the unpardonable sin and going to judgment in AD70. In either case, the words justified and condemned don't refer to going to heaven or going to hell in the context, though that would be true in the background of their decision. The important point of vv 33-37 is that a Jew in that generation could separate himself from the judgment coming on that generation by rejecting the Pharisees explanation and following after Jesus.

In 12:38 some of the scribes and Pharisees requested to see a sign from Him, as if what He had already done was insufficient. In 12:39 their request only further evidenced to Jesus that they were evil. They did not really want to see another sign in order to believe. He pronounced that generation to not only be evil but adulterous, the physical counterpart to spiritual idolatry. They worshipped the idols of religious ritualism and self-righteousness. The only sign that generation would receive would be the sign of Jonah the prophet. In 12:40 the sign of Jonah the prophet is that he was separated from the land of the living for three days and then returned to the land of the living as testimony. The Son of Man would be likewise. Resurrection then is the only sign. In 12:41 He pronounces judgment on that generation. When Jonah went and preached to the Ninevites they had repented but that generation of Israel did not repent at the one greater than Jonah, the Messiah. This qualified the Ninevites to stand up at the judgment and condemn that generation. In 12:42, the Queen of the South came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and she repented but that generation of Israel did not repent at the preaching of the one greater than Solomon, the Messiah. That qualified her to stand up at the judgment and condemn that generation. Both examples show that Gentiles had been more responsive to God's message than that generation of Israel.

As a consequence in 12:43-45 we read an analogy of a demon possessed man who signifies that generation of Israel under the influence of the religious system of the Pharisees. The man had a demon but was cleansed from the demon only to find that when the demon found no one else to enter into he returned to the same man, but this time with seven other demons more wicked than himself and entered into him making his final state worse than the first. By analogy that generation of Israel had been under the religious system of the Pharisees when

John first came preaching a message of repentance for the kingdom was at hand. When many responded by repenting they were freed from the influence of the Pharisees. But when they did not continue following Jesus, the one John pointed to, they came back under the influence of the Pharisees and joined them in the rejection. Now the state of that generation was worse than when John first came. They were like a man possessed by eight demons. Originally they had been possessed by one demon and thereby partially blinded by the religious system of the Pharisees but now they were possessed by eight demons and completely blinded. Jesus would now speak in parables but they would not understand.

Before we introduce the discourse in parables in Matt 13 we have one small but important pericope to work through at the end of Matthew 12. This is the story of His family coming to Him and His rejection of them as His family. It's caused a lot of confusion. In Matt 12:46 we read, **While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him.** The expression **While He was still speaking to the crowds** shows that this occurred in close connection with what came before. What came before was Jesus' description of that generation as worse off now than when John first came. Mark 3:21 adds that His family members thought the things He was saying were so extraordinary that "He had lost His senses." Their ultimate purpose was to rescue Him from His madness. Apparently Jesus was in a house and **His mother and brothers were standing outside** the house since later in 13:1 it says "That day Jesus went out of the house..." But at this time He was still in the house. There were crowds of people surrounding Him so **His mother and brothers** could not enter into the house. And Matthew adds that they were **seeking to speak to Him.**<sup>1</sup>

12:47 is a variant in the text. The question is whether this verse is original or added by a scribal mistake known as homoeteleuton.<sup>2</sup> Metzger and his committee give it a C rating which means they had difficulty deciding which variant was original. The verse states that **Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You."** This statement would seem necessary, especially when you consider the fact that He was in a house surrounded by a crowd and the parallel in Mark 3:31 which says "they sent word to Him." Therefore I accept the verse as original. They were outside the house and sent word to Him through the crowd.

When the message reaches Jesus in 12:48 we find the difficult statement. **But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"**<sup>49</sup> **And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."** Pentecost said, "The natural response to that question would be: those with whom You have a blood relationship. But rather than recognizing blood ties as constituting a true relationship He pointed to His disciples, that is, those who by faith had accepted His person."<sup>3</sup> Jesus was not dishonoring His mother Mary or His brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas with whom He had a physical relationship. What He did was reject the idea that physical relationship was sufficient to enter the kingdom. Jesus is interacting with the common Jewish belief that a physical relationship to Abraham was

sufficient for kingdom entrance. John the Baptist had expressed this belief when he said to the Sadducees and Pharisees in Matthew 3:9, "And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham." This belief, was, of course, incorrect. Physical relationship to Abraham was not sufficient for kingdom entrance. As Toussaint says, "Participation in the Messianic kingdom is not merely based upon a claim to Abraham's family, but is contingent upon a spiritual relationship to Christ (Matthew 3:9)." Jesus is emphasizing the spiritual relationship contrary to common Jewish belief. Since that generation did not have a spiritual relationship with Him but only a physical one then His rejection of His mother and brothers is actually a rejection of that generation. They would not enter the kingdom.

On the flipside those who did have a spiritual relationship with Him He stretched **out His hand toward**, they were **His disciples**, and **He said, Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.** Those who had a spiritual relationship to Him were **His disciples**. This striking lesson would have struck a chord with those who caught His meaning. They probably did not catch it but His meaning was that only **His disciples** would take part in the coming kingdom because only they had a spiritual relationship with Him that is necessary to enter the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Pentecost makes some good concluding remarks, "The nation that rejected Christ was in a worse state because of that rejection than they had been before the gracious offer of the kingdom was made. And the One who offered the kingdom now rejected the nation that had rejected Him."<sup>5</sup> From this point forward then the kingdom is never said to be 'at hand' and it is no longer being offered. The reason is simple. They had rejected Him and He rejected them.

Now we come to the parables of Matthew 13 and there are scores of books written on the parables and the mysteries of the kingdom. What the scores of books almost invariably leave out is the context and we're going to look at that but because of the failure to interpret according to context four major interpretations of the mysteries of the kingdom have developed. The first view is the view of ultradispensationalism, sometimes referred to as extreme dispensationalism. This view says that the mysteries of the kingdom refer to new truths about the future millennial kingdom and so have no reference to the period between the two comings of Christ. Instead the parables refer to the period of the future kingdom and have no reference to the period that includes the Church. The second view is the view of amillennialism and postmillennialism. This view says that the mysteries of the kingdom were given as a corrective to the Jews who thought the kingdom was earthly but actually refers to the Church as a spiritual kingdom. So they see no future kingdom on earth. The third view is the view of some classical dispensationalists, progressive dispensationalists and historic premillennialists. This view says that the mysteries of the kingdom refer to an already present mystery form of the kingdom which is a spiritual kingdom that is broader than the Church but inclusive of it with a not-yet earthly kingdom to be established in the future. The fourth view is the view of classic dispensationalists. This view says that the mysteries of the kingdom refer to new truths about the kingdom's postponement, namely the concept that

those who are not the natural sons of the kingdom will come to faith in the Messiah and become citizens of the future kingdom which will only come when Israel repents.

There are several contexts that one must evaluate to know which interpretation is correct. When you think of interpreting in context you might think of a target with the outer rings representing the broader contexts and the inner rings the nearer contexts or we might think of a spiral. There is the broad context of the entire Bible, then the narrower context of the testament, then inside that the book, within that the chapters and within that the pericope and then the verse before and the verse after. What you're trying to do is interpret each text within these contexts starting broadly and moving in more specifically to the center of the target so you are spot on. Matthew 13, to be interpreted correctly, must be interpreted in these contexts. First, in terms of the greater context of the whole Bible. The Bible has a kingdom program defined by the covenants given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the nation Israel, David and the King Messiah. Matthew's specific contribution from verse 1 is to the King and His kingdom program. In other words, the concept of the King and the kingdom as used by Matthew is in terms of the prior kingdom of Israel in the OT as established in David's house in Jerusalem on earth and destroyed by the Babylonians. Matthew does not re-define the kingdom as the Church, a concept which Jesus will not introduce until Matt 16:18. Nor does he redefine it as an already present mystery form of the kingdom spanning from the rejection of Israel to the acceptance of Israel. Matthew is simply receiving his definition of the kingdom from prior usage in the OT as that of a King from the house of David who is rightful heir of the throne of David and the kingdom to be restored is the kingdom of the heavens in its visible, political and spiritual manifestation on the earth. Since Matthew never redefines anywhere in his book then the kingdom he is referring to in the parables is this same kingdom, which obviously is not here in any sense now. Second, in terms of the context of the Book of Matthew, his argument is that Jesus is the King and He offered the kingdom but that generation rejected it and so the kingdom has been postponed. He's not trying to prove that there is a spiritual form of the kingdom now or that the Jews were wrong in thinking that the kingdom would be re-established on earth. Remember that Matthew was writing for a purpose. Every book is written for a purpose and when you look at Matthew's book you see that he was writing to Jewish believers about AD 50 and they are scattered throughout the Mediterranean world in city after city. And where do they live in these cities? In the Jewish ghetto. There was always the Jewish ghetto. And in these ghettos you have Jewish believers living alongside Jewish unbelievers. So what is always going to be the argument that the Jewish unbelievers make to the Jewish believers who claim that Jesus is the King? If Jesus is the King where is His kingdom? It would not really do to say it is a spiritual kingdom. If that is the case then why in Acts 1 did Jesus' disciples ask Jesus if it was at this time He was restoring the kingdom? If they were wrong about the nature of the kingdom Jesus should have corrected them right there. But Jesus did not correct them. There was no need to correct them. They understood the kingdom was still future, they just did not know when. What Matthew is doing is writing to help Jewish believers answer the question about why Jesus' kingdom was not here if Jesus was really the King. So Matthew 1-12 proves that Jesus is the King. He has the genealogy of the King, He has the supernatural

conception of the King, He fulfills prophecy of the King, He has the orthodox teaching of the King, and He has the authenticating miracles of the King. All these prove that He is the King and that the kingdom had come near. Matt 13 begins to show that the mysteries of the kingdom are the concept that the kingdom would be delayed in its arrival (from the human standpoint) until Israel received Jesus as the King. So the solution that has explanatory power is that the kingdom's arrival in history was contingent on Israel's reception of their King. And Matt 11-12 show that that generation rejected the King and so Matt 13 shows that the new truths being revealed about the kingdom are that it will be delayed and during that delay there is going to be a calling out of those who are not the natural sons of the kingdom to be kingdom citizens and then Israel will receive Him as their King and the kingdom will come. That is the contextual argument of the Book of Matthew. Third, in terms of the chapter context surrounding Matthew 13, remember that Matthew is writing according to a definite structure of narrative followed by discourse. Each narrative-discourse section is marked off by the words "When Jesus had finished these things" (*και εγενετο οτε ετελεσεν ο Ιησους*). The narrative gives the context for the following discourse. The narrative in this section began in 11:1 where we read, "When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities." The narrative continues through Matt 11 and 12 and sets the context for the discourse in Matt 13. We need to understand that the entirety of Matt 11 and 12 record the story of the rejection and that Matt 13 is the response to the rejection. This is probably where most have gone astray. They have not gone back far enough into the context to really grasp the significance of what is happening. It begins early in Matt 11 with one of the most fascinating sections in Scripture. No other Gospel writer records this so it is particular to Matthew's argument. It's the event where John is in prison and he hears of the works of the Messiah and so he sends some of his disciples to Him to ask, "Are you the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" And Jesus answers "Go and report to John what you hear and see" and He quotes Isa 35, Messianic works, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them." I said at that time that it's strange that John, the forerunner of the King, is questioning whether Jesus is the King. But he might have been confused about the timing of the kingdom's arrival because it seems that John expected to be released and delivered and taken into the kingdom right away. But instead he was about to die and so what was going on with the kingdom? That may be but I've taken another look at this in hindsight and it seems to me that John is not confused as to whether Jesus is really the King or not, he knows he's the King, but his own disciples are not going after the King and so he is sending them to ask Jesus this question for their own benefit. He wants them to stop following him and to follow Jesus. And Jesus' answer points them right back to Scripture. I'm the King because I do the works predicted by the OT Scriptures of the King. So John was pointing them to Jesus as the King. That was his mission as the forerunner and he was fulfilling his mission but not even his disciples were believing in the King! So something is dreadfully wrong. And when they leave Jesus uses this as an occasion to speak to the crowds about John and the greatness of John, you see, because John is not just a prophet, John is the forerunner of the King. This means no one in history was as great as John because no one else had as great a privilege as John of being the forerunner and preparing the way. So if they received the kingdom offer then John

would be Elijah. But they weren't receiving the kingdom and so they weren't receiving John, but instead rejecting Him. And that my friend is the beginning of the rejection of the King Himself because in order to reject the King you have to first reject the forerunner of the King. So what we're seeing in Matt 11 is that the forerunner is being rejected and this is a harbinger of the rejection of the King Himself. Jesus says it Himself in 11:18-19, "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' that's the rejection of the forerunner and then He turns to Himself saying, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' that's the beginning of the rejection of the King. So I said before draw a thick black line between 11:19 and 20 and that's pretty correct but you might think about the connection with the rejection of John earlier because the rejection of the King starts with the rejection of the forerunner of the King. Then we read in 11:20-24 Jesus pronouncing judgment on whole cities of Israel. It becomes quite clear that they are not going to repent. Then in 11:25 we find out that because they are not going to repent certain truths are going to be hidden from those who reject and revealed to those who received Him. These, of course, refers to mystery truths of the kingdom. And He's calling individuals to separate from the leadership and follow Him so they can learn these new truths. So this is definitely preparatory for the parables in Matt 13. And what I'm saying here is that you have to go all the way back into Matt 11 to get the stage set for interpreting Matt 13 correctly. It's not even enough to go back to Matt 12, you have to go back to Matt 11. Then in Matt 12 the Pharisees are trying to catch Him violating the Law but He is completely dismantling their religious system right before their eyes, showing them to be phonies and presenting Himself clearly as the King. It's a powerful chapter of Scripture. In 12:14 the Pharisees join hands with the Herodians to determine how to destroy Him. So they are set on murdering Him now. It's not whether they're going to do it, it's how they're going to do it. So we see that He withdraws and this is where we learn of the three-fold pattern that will take us from here through the rest of Matthew's gospel and that is opposition—withdrawal—training. Why withdraw when opposition arises? Because it's not His time to die for the sins of the world. He needs some time to train His disciples for the new interadvent age. These are the mystery truths of the kingdom, not that there is going to be a new form of the kingdom but that the kingdom is going to be postponed and during this time those who are not natural sons of the kingdom are going to receive kingdom citizenship. If Jesus was crucified at this time then no one would understand what was going on. So He withdraws and you see Gentiles coming to Him and He's preaching to them as a foreview of the coming interadvent age. You see Him still doing miracles but He says, 'don't tell anyone' because He doesn't want to draw too much attention to Himself. He needs time to teach His disciples about the period of the kingdom's postponement, which was something entirely new. And that sheds definite light on the parables in Matt 13, they are new truths about the preparatory period of the kingdom's postponement. Then, of course, in 12:24 the rejection itself by the leadership. This is a grave sin, the unpardonable sin, they accused Jesus of being continually demon-possessed and so now things are really taking shape and Jesus is telling the people they've got a choice to make and they better separate from the Pharisees because if they don't they're identifying with them in the unpardonable sin. Then in 12:43-45 the rejection is determined and that generation having rejected Him is now worse off than they were when John first came.

They're going to be blinded and that is definitely helpful in explaining to us why Jesus is speaking in parables in Matt 13. And finally in 12:46-50 Jesus rejects that generation. Lights out. And that concludes the narrative that gives us the context for the discourse that begins in 13:1. All this is the context starting with the greater context of the whole Bible, moving into Matthew and his argument and finally to the immediate chapters of 11 and 12 that sketch the rejection of that generation. This is how you interpret.

So the kingdom is always the same kingdom, it's the Davidic kingdom which is a visible, earthly, political, spiritual kingdom with a restored Davidic monarch sitting on the restored Davidic throne in Jerusalem. But the kingdom has been rejected by Israel and consequently that kingdom is being postponed. This was something totally unknown before this time, there was no concept of the kingdom being postponed in the OT or that during a postponement there would be a certain growth of kingdom citizens alongside Satan's servants and then and only then would the judgment come to take out Satan's servants and leave the kingdom citizens to enter into the kingdom. A lot of this, we will see, is paralleled in Matt 24-25, the Olivet Discourse. But you can see I take this fourth view; that the mysteries of the kingdom refer to new truths concerning the kingdom's postponement. And during this postponement those who are not the natural sons of the kingdom will come to faith in the Messiah and become citizens of the coming kingdom. We'll look more at these views in the coming weeks but that basically sets the stage for the parables and mysteries of the kingdom in Matt 13. Next time we'll define parables and mysteries more closely and start working our way through the discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Note should be made of Mary, His mother, as well as His brothers. As far as Mary is concerned there is no need to elevate Mary to a position on par with one of the members of the Trinity as the Roman Catholic Church has done. Their development of the Doctrine of Mary took leaps and bounds in the 19th and 20th century. By the immaculate conception she was miraculously conceived and without a sin nature. By the ascension she miraculously ascended to heaven. By the mediatrix she became co-mediatrix with Christ. Scripturally she is not to be elevated to such a position. As far as His brothers Jesus did have half-brothers as well as half-sisters (cf 13:55). From this we gather that Mary did not remain a perpetual virgin. The Roman Catholic Church invented the idea that Joseph had children through another wife prior to Mary. These teachings are invented ideas that distract one from the true meaning of the text.

<sup>2</sup> A homoeteleuton is a "like ending" of the words on two successive lines, which allow the scribes eyes to skip a line.

<sup>3</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 210.

<sup>4</sup> J. Vernon McGee notes, "The Lord is saying that the strongest relationship today is the relationship between Christ and a believer. Friend, if you are a child of God and you have unsaved family members, you are closer to Jesus Christ than you are to your own kin, including the mother that bore you."

<sup>5</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 210-211.